

MarTech's guide to agile marketing for teams

How to get started and stay successful leveraging this powerful marketing framework



By Stacey Ackerman,
Agilify Coaching and Training

In association with

MARTECH

Introduction

If you've been working on a marketing team that's been dabbling with agile, but want to really dive into some actionable ways to go from good to great, this e-book is for you. A lot of marketers like you have seen their companies trying to embrace agile marketing, but many struggle with how to apply it in a way that adds value to team members.

We've written this e-book as a guide so that you can lead your agile marketing team towards better agile marketing practices.

We'll dive into collaboration and teamwork, and explore how an agile marketing team is much more than a group of people assigned to work together. The team should have a shared purpose and win or lose together.

The marketing backlog process is a key component for making sure your team works on only the most important items. We'll dig into prioritization and how to optimize backlogs for clarity and shared understanding of work.

You'll learn how great agile marketing teams balance sticking to a plan with remaining flexible for ad hoc requests. Plus, learn how your team can say no to work that doesn't add value without making the boss mad.

A key ingredient for success in agile marketing is feedback. While it's easy to collect feedback, using it in your workflow and adjusting your plans accordingly is a bit more challenging. Learn the different ways that feedback can flow naturally for your team.

The best agile marketing teams don't just tackle a process, but adopt principles and values of agile that lead to culture change. Learn how you as a team member can help influence and bring about positive culture change at your company.

This e-book will serve as your guide for working on an agile marketing team and helping lead your colleagues in a way that will not only benefit you, but your customers as well.

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Chapter 1: collaboration & team work

Great agile marketers have one thing in common—a true team mentality; they're not just a bunch of people forced to work together. Learn how to move from being an individual contributor to a true team player.

Are we really a team?

To truly embrace the level of collaboration and teamwork required for success in agile marketing, you must be able to visualize what team success looks like. In marketing, we've spent a long time working on individual tasks and being rated on job performance by how we perform solo.

An agile team is really different, and it should feel a lot more like a sports team than a typical work group. Think about a high school football team during its homecoming game. All of the players are aligned on one big outcome—winning!

While everyone on the team has a primary position, they win or lose as a team. If Evan only cares about getting a touchdown and being the big star, he may not pass the ball to his teammates, and ultimately the team will lose because they aren't working together.

An agile marketing team needs to understand what game they're playing and how they can win. Then, everyone needs to work together to make that happen.



“An agile marketing team needs to understand what game they're playing and how they can win. Then, everyone needs to work together to make that happen.”

The best agile teams I've worked with don't always have fancy tools—what they do have is a clear understanding of what they're trying to accomplish, and everyone offers to pitch in and help.

Creating a shared purpose

In order to build a high-performing team, you must have a shared purpose for working together. Often I see teams put together for the sake of checking a box, but everyone is working on individual tasks with no real understanding of the underlying goal and purpose of the team.

If this is the case, take some time with your team to create a team charter. The team vision creation needs to be done with the entire team, so find a time where you can get active participation from everyone.

A few examples of good team visions are:

“To reach physicians in the hospitals that we service with meaningful marketing messages”

“To provide engaging social media content to prospective customers that will make them fall in love with our brand”

The team vision should be something that's not one and done, but truly creates the reason for your team's existence. Why are you a team? What do you strive to accomplish together? Keep the team's vision somewhere visible to all team members and talk about it often, especially if you notice team members veering in another direction.

Your team should also decide how they will best work together and formulate a working agreement. Some things to cover are:

- How should we communicate with each other?
- What would make this team awesome?
- What things poison a team that we need to avoid?

Getting these answers is best done when all voices in the room can be heard. If you're working remotely, use a collaborative sticky note or whiteboard tool to allow participants to submit ideas.

I've facilitated several of these sessions with clients, and the best teams are empowered to do this without management intervention. The teams get really excited about defining their superpower!

My favorite team that did this was a team of non-marketers that was formed to clean up some technical problems. It's work that most people would find really boring and not having a really big wow factor, but this team was passionate about its mission! "We're the Blasters," they told me as they enthusiastically whiteboarded out their purpose for existing.

Aligning on Big Hairy Audacious Goals

Big Hairy Audacious Goals (BHAGs) are a great way to align your team on what success looks like. While BHAGs don't say everything that your team will be working on, it is helpful in aligning the team on what success looks like.

Aligning on BHAGs can be done quarterly or monthly, depending on the length of time your campaigns or projects are taking to complete.

To align on BHAGs, a marketing owner, product owner or project owner would facilitate a working session with the team. This person should be able to clearly articulate one or two key things that the team will work on over the few months. This is what will align the team on what game they're playing and how they can win.

A few good BHAG examples I've seen are:

"Create a memorable trade show experience for our physician clients"

"Promote our new online class offering"

"Launch a partnership program"



The challenge that plagues agile marketing teams is we too often go from very high level goals, such as BHAGs or KPIs, to individual tasks. This makes it really challenging for you, a member of an agile marketing team, to connect the dots.

When we can come up with BHAGs, we can then go from the KPI measurement to something more actionable that everyone can get their heads around.



Breaking work into stories

While BHAGs are great at getting the team aligned around a big goal, the team then needs to break down the work into smaller, bite-sized chunks. By writing customer stories (also called user stories), the team can break the work down from something really big to the actual work they'll do on the team.

Let's take the example of promoting the online class offering, one of the sample BHAGs listed above. Your team needs to work together to understand what will go into this promotion. Hold a collaborative brainstorming session to think about all of the marketing involved such as e-mails, social posts, blog articles, webinars, etc.

Now, writing the work into stories gets us away from "mine vs. yours" and aligns the team on "ours". We must all accomplish this story together to make it a success. To get stories written, do it collaboratively with your team.

A few examples stories are:

"As a student, I want to receive an email notifying me when the class will be offered."

"As a student, I want to attend a free webinar about the class so that I can see if the content resonates with me."

"As a student, I want to watch a YouTube video about agile marketing so that I understand how to get started."

When we move away from assigning tasks to marketers and instead look at the value to the customer, we can then see who needs to get involved. A story typically takes more than one team member to accomplish, so this tactic alone builds in the natural tendency to collaborate.

Becoming a great team member

Once you are structurally set up to work on a team, what can you do to be a great team member? Here are a few tips and tricks to get you going.

First, don't be afraid to share your knowledge with other team members. Let's say you are the team's graphic designer — you can quickly become the bottleneck to getting stories completed. Help other team members learn some basic skills or set them up with tools like Canva where they can get user friendly design templates. You could also create some branded template designs so that your team members become less dependent on you.

Next, be willing to learn some skills that are out of your comfort zone. If you're the team's content marketer, pair with your designer to be able to add some basic images to your work.

A great team member is always thinking more about the success of their team than their own work, so start saying things like "our work" versus "my work". That small change in vernacular can really help build the sense of team.

As a team member, you're all part of creating a shared culture. If you notice your team is stressed out, suggest everyone tell a joke before the meeting begins. Find ways to make work fun, such as having a virtual happy hour or playing an online game to get to know each other better.

High-performing agile marketing teams have one thing in common—they work together to solve a common problem. By understanding what you're striving for as a team, having clear goals, and writing work as collaborative stories, you'll be on your way to succeeding with agile marketing.



Chapter 2: setting clear priorities

The best agile marketing teams I've seen are masters at prioritization. Learn how your team should assign singular responsibility for prioritization, and optimize its backlog for clearly communicating priorities, and keep from over-committing and burning out.

A single person on the team needs to prioritize

While your agile marketing team doesn't necessarily need to follow the Scrum framework by the book, the one thing you absolutely need to do is have a single person responsible for prioritization on each team. This person may be called a product owner, a marketing owner, a strategist, a project manager, team lead or even just a manager. Regardless of the title, they're the single source of defining what is most valuable to customers and the organization.

When there isn't a unique role that has this responsibility, your team accepts all work requests, regardless if they're in the best interest of the business's overall goals and strategy or not. This leads to feeling burnt out as a team member and a lot of context switching.

I've heard so many complaints from marketing team members that they're overworked, they're constantly getting new requests, and that they don't feel like they're accomplishing anything. This old school way of producing output rather than focusing on business outcomes is the cause of people leaving their jobs.

I'm coaching a company right now that doesn't have anyone on the team responsible for prioritization. They're using Asana to manage work, which is a good start, but anyone on the team can enter work at any time, and they tend to come in as last-minute tickets rather than well-thought-out priorities.

What is Scrum?



Scrum organizes projects using cross-functional Scrum teams, each one of which has all of the capabilities necessary to deliver a piece of functionality from idea to delivery.

The Scrum framework

The **Scrum framework** guides the creation of a product, focusing on value and high visibility of progress. Working from a dynamic list of the most valuable things to do, a Scrum team brings that product from an idea to delivery using the Scrum framework as a guide for transparency, inspection, and adaptation.

Scrum events

Scrum is probably best known for events or activities that occur inside each sprint.

- The Sprint is the heartbeat of Scrum. Each sprint should bring the product closer to the product goal and is a month or less in length.
- Sprint Planning by the entire Scrum team establishes the sprint goal, what can be done, and how the chosen work will be completed.
- Daily Scrum serves to inspect the progress toward the sprint goal, adjusting the upcoming planned work.
- Sprint Review - The entire Scrum team inspects the sprint's outcome with stakeholders and determines future adaptations. Stakeholders are invited to provide feedback on the increment.

While the practice of having everyone on the team enter work isn't necessarily bad, the fact that no one is there to funnel through the right work leaves the team overloaded, juggling too many competing priorities and starting a lot of projects, but not delivering value to customers. So getting new ideas from the team is great—as long as there is a single person who can vet those ideas against all of the other ideas to decide what's the most important.



“The best agile marketing teams I've seen are masters at prioritization.”

The best teams I've worked with have this role clearly defined. This person spends about half the time with business stakeholders and customers looking ahead at priorities, and the other half of the time with the team answering questions about the strategy and outcomes expected of the work. What this role doesn't do is define how the team will work—that's part of what an agile marketing team does on its own.

If you don't have a role on the team today responsible for prioritizing, I encourage you to help your organization define someone who can. This person should be able to:

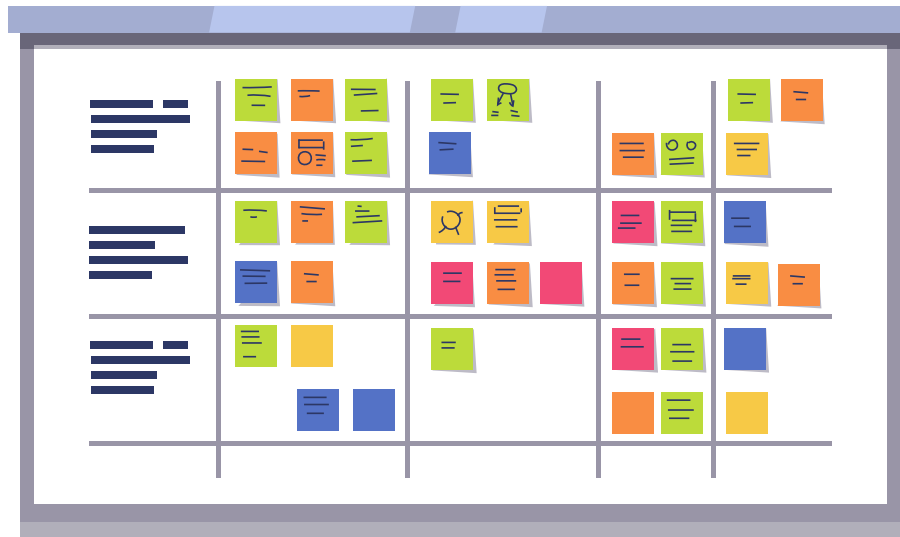
- Have access to key stakeholders and customers
- Be able to make priority decisions
- Have time to work with the team on a day-to-day basis (not doing work, but communicating priorities)
- Feel comfortable saying “No”

A retail company that I worked with had recently begun agile marketing. They embraced the product owner role and she had visibility into all of the work that had already been requested to the team. Before agile marketing, those requests were going to individual team members, so there was no visibility into the overall picture of just how much work was on the team's plate.



The product owner put all of the work requests into a backlog and had the team provide sizing to the work. When they added it all up, they discovered that the team had already committed to two years worth of work!

They realized they had two choices to make—hire several new people and create at least two more teams, or decide which campaigns weren't going to get done. They chose the latter and learned that many of the ideas were not even needed anymore. The marketing team was able to streamline the work and the team was able to work at a much more manageable pace.



Optimizing work through a marketing backlog

Once you've defined who will be in charge of prioritization, all work requests need to funnel through that role. This is one of the most difficult parts of agile marketing to implement, but it's also one of the most effective ways to keep your team focused on working on the most valuable tasks and delivering value to customers earlier.

Brace yourself for this one—in agile marketing your manager no longer assigns you work! Yes, that's right—the marketing backlog is the single source of truth for what the team will work on next and it has to be funneled through the one role that understands all work the team may need to do so that the team can actually accomplish something.

If agile marketing is new to your organization, it's going to be critical that everyone on the team educates their managers on how this works. While they may not like losing control over work assignments, this elevates managers and gets them out of the weeds so that they are able to do more strategic work.

So when work comes to you as a team member from your manager or anyone else, you'll need to be able to explain how the team is now working off of one prioritized backlog. The benefit to this is clear visibility and having the team work on the most important items.

Some teams allow requestors to enter whatever they want into the team's backlog, but the marketing owner must be able to distinguish new requests from old ones, which is feasible in many agile tools. Other teams I've seen do a great job of planning quarterly priorities with their stakeholders and work gets added to the backlog at that time.

The marketing backlog is a fluid, transparent place for all future work. Your team's marketing owner should be looking at it daily, moving things up or down the list as they learn more from how campaigns are performing and what stakeholders are needing.

If you're not the marketing owner, encourage that person on your team to keep the marketing backlog up-to-date so all team members and stakeholders can easily see upcoming work and what's the most important at any given time.

Setting Prioritization Criteria

What about those pesky last-minute urgent requests? We don't want to create such a rigid system that we can't ever respond to those, but the team and stakeholders need to define "urgent" and what's worth interrupting the team or causing planned work to slip. Urgent requests need to be the exception, not the rule, or your team will never get anything done.

The product owner should lead the prioritization criteria and determine what is really urgent. A good rule of thumb—*If we don't do this work today, will it cause loss of sales, bad publicity or upset customers?*

The team's priorities should always be leading up to larger business goals. *Are we trying to sell a new product? Get new customers? Keep old customers? Which of these is most important to our organization at this point in time?* The marketing owner needs to always understand this and recognize that not everything can be an equal priority.

The most effective way to set the team's priorities is to align on those big goals with stakeholders and to maintain a quarterly roadmap of key projects. As new requests come in, the marketing owner needs to assess them against the agreed upon priorities. This role may need to be asking:

- *How does this work tie into our roadmap goals?*
- *Does this work have an urgent market need?*
- *What are the negative impacts if we don't take on this work?*
- *How will this work benefit our customers?*
- *Will this work impact other work we're doing?*

When your team clearly understands business priorities and how work impacts the roadmap, customers and the team, it will be well on its way to succeeding with agile marketing.

Chapter 3: Effective Planning

A big challenge that agile marketers face is trying to balance being agile with planned work. You need to figure out how your team can stay focused and uninterrupted, while still allowing for important changes to happen. A lot of this depends on the nature of your work, but there are definitely some good practices to be learned.

First, let's examine the ultra rigid agile marketing team. They plan their work in two week sprints and absolutely nothing can interrupt them. When a stakeholder has an urgent request, it may take months to get it through the queue and it really annoys the team. On the plus side, the team may be very high performing because they're able to focus on their work without any interruptions.

More commonly, however, I see what I call "chaos agile" practices happening. The team will say things like, "We don't need to plan, we're agile." Or the organization thinks agile marketing means they can switch gears faster than Beyoncé changes outfits during a performance.

Your team needs to find the middle ground.

Sprint Planning for success

The first step to finding that middle ground is the practice of Sprint Planning. I suggest planning for one week if it's challenging for your team to stick to a plan, and planning for two weeks if you tend to work on larger projects or campaigns.

The goal of Sprint Planning is to have the team look at the items in the prioritized backlog and decide which ones they can commit to completing in the given sprint time box of one or two weeks. The idea is to move away from the team starting a bunch of work and doing it independently, to focusing on delivery of value to the customer by the end of the sprint.



With most teams, work requests seem to be never-ending and there's no limit to what the team is asked to do.

A good practice is to begin with stating the goal of the sprint. This should come from the marketing owner (or similar role). It's not a list of every item expected, but rather what success would look like for the team at the end of the week or two.

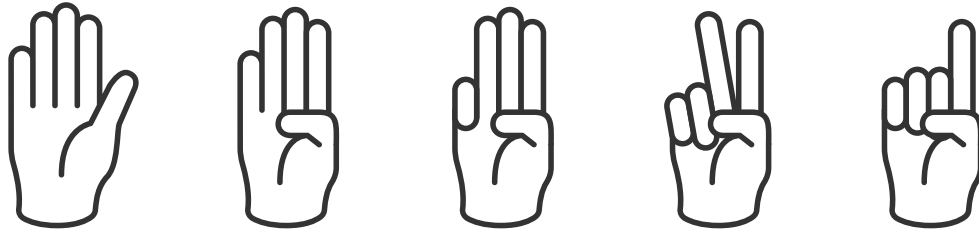
It may be something like, "Our goal in this sprint is to launch a micro-campaign to reach prospective buyers in the Seattle area for our new cold brew coffee flavor of the month. We'll be focusing this week on social media outreach."

When the team can be united on what success looks like, it keeps them focused and everyone works better together to accomplish a common goal.

Next, take a look at the team's capacity. You don't need to account for every minute of people's time, but the team should communicate if anyone is taking vacation time or has other work outside of the team that would impact their commitment to the sprint goal.

The team will then look at the prioritized backlog and pull in items they believe they can accomplish. No one should be influencing the team here or telling them they can do more. Your team is accountable for delivery and needs to feel in control of what it can accomplish.

Once the team has selected the backlog items they feel they can get done, it's a good practice to do a confidence vote. A technique called Fist of Five helps your team decide if everyone is in agreement about how much work was selected. A five means they strongly agree, whereas a one indicates strong disagreement, with the middle numbers being a range.



For most teams, I'd plan for what you think is 80 percent full, still allowing some room for people to be out of the office unexpectedly and work taking longer than the team expected (because let's face it, that always happens).

If your team is newer to agile and still works in a highly disruptive environment, I'd lower the planned work commitment to something like 50%, with the idea that you'd like to get to 80% planned in the future. In this case, it's a good idea to create a ticket called "Unplanned Work" and track how much time is happening in this category.



Handling sprint interruptions

Once the team commits to the work in the sprint, the intent is that any interruptions to the sprint need to be discussed by the team, as it impacts the work they've committed to already.

The requests need to be brought to the attention of the marketing owner role and presented to the team. In most cases, the work should not be added to the sprint, but traded out for something else that wasn't started.

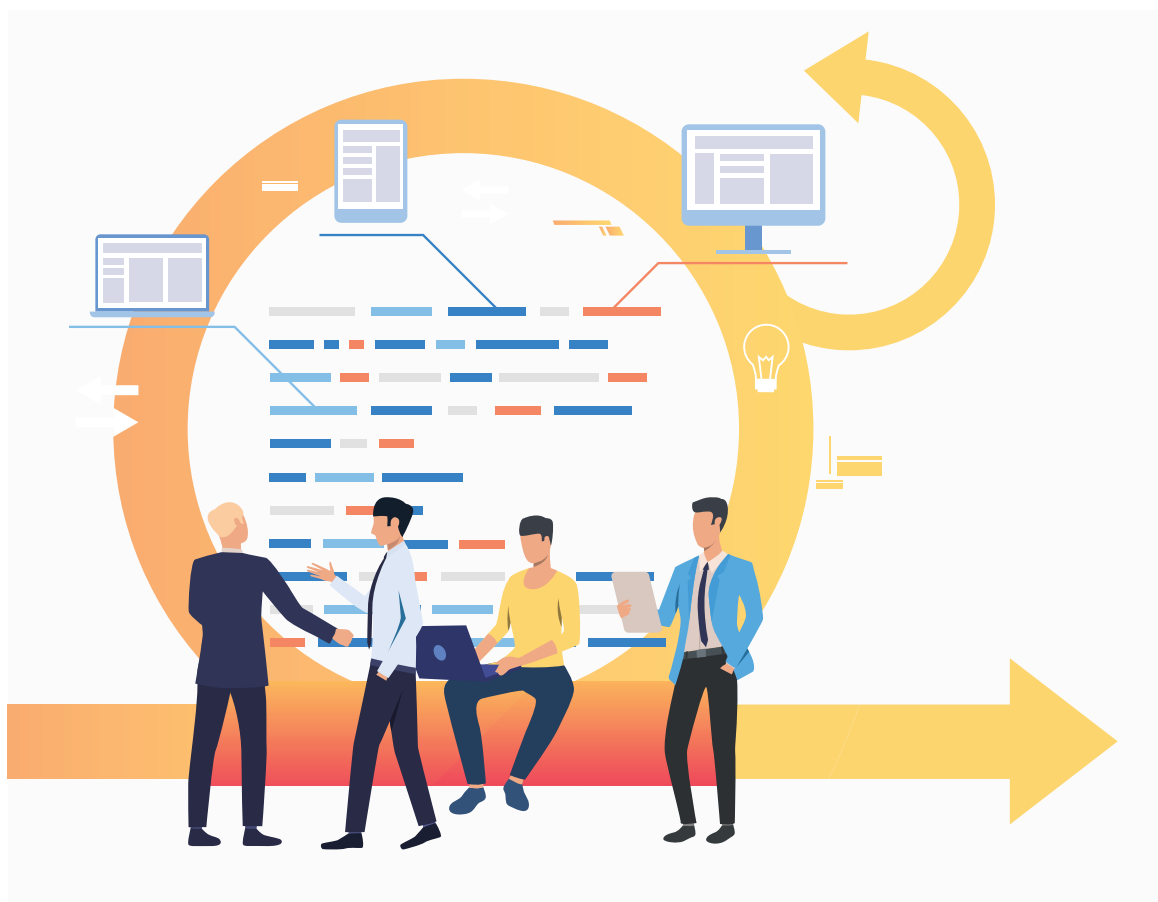
The product owner may come to the team and say, “Jim from Sales said that they just signed up to attend a tradeshow next week and they need a product sheet to pass out. Can we get that done this sprint?”

As a team, you'll want to make sure you have enough understanding of the new work to be able to get it done right now. If there are still unanswered questions, it will take longer. Then the team's default answer should be, “If we take on the product sheet work, we won't be able to work on the webinar this week.”

By handling sprint interruptions this way, we're not jeopardizing the team's commitment, yet remaining somewhat flexible if something comes up that is truly more urgent.

If your team plans for the unplanned, you can reserve a certain amount of the team's time for ad hoc requests, but it can't be unlimited. Let's say your team saves eight hours for ad hoc requests, but 20 hours worth of them are happening. The marketing owner needs to prioritize which ones need to happen this sprint, and which can come in subsequent sprints.

With most teams, work requests seem to be never-ending and there's no limit to what the team is asked to do. By setting some boundaries, yet remaining flexible, you'll be able to strike that right balance between accomplishing work and meeting stakeholders' urgent needs.



Chapter 4: Deciding What You're Not Going To Do

The best agile marketing teams have bigger goals that allow them to work on the right work at the right time. Learn how you and your team can push back on requests that aren't in alignment, allowing the most valuable work to get completed, while building trust with your stakeholders.

Show the Impacts to Other Work

When your team gets in the habit of committing to work in a sprint (a one or two week time box), when new work gets requested, something else isn't going to get done. Let's dig into how we can respond to Jim's request for the product sheet.

A good response here might be, "I see the urgency with your tradeshow happening, but the team is working on the direct mail postcards you asked for a few weeks ago and we're right in the middle of them. If we stop to do the presentation, those won't get done. If we continue, those can get mailed this week. Which one is more important to you?"

"The best agile marketing teams have bigger goals that allow them to work on the right work at the right time."

If the Sales manager says the direct mail postcards, then you've proven that the new request wasn't as urgent as he made it seem. If he says the product sheet, you've set realistic expectations that he can't have both.

There's definitely an impact to the team when they stop work they've already started, so it should be a team conversation as to how much this will impact them. In other words, change isn't free. It comes with a price, and that price is time. Stopping and starting work is one of the biggest suckers of the team's time. However, the trade-off conversation is a much better one than what typically happens—everyone just saying yes to any work requests.

Saying "no" to pet projects is necessary

Not all work that people want is good for your company or your customers. There are always way more good ideas than there are people to do them. An empowered product owner on your team should understand the goals of the business and recognize when requests come in that are "pet projects."

Saying "no" is really difficult, but it gets much easier when there's a shared understanding with leaders about what's important.

Let's say that a finance manager comes up to you, the product owner, and wants to know if you can do a social campaign about a new loan offering. A good response is, "Thanks for the suggestion Jenny, however, we have a big quarterly goal centered around another product. It's just not the focus of our team right now."

If you're not in the product owner role, it's really important that any request for work get in front of the product owner to evaluate how it stacks up against the big goals.

Building Stakeholder Trust

When the team gets better at either making trade-off decisions with work or saying no altogether, they're better able to gain trust with their stakeholders.

I worked with a team at a large company that had a terrible reputation for never getting any work done on time. The stakeholders had really pegged them as a problem team and they had a bad reputation to overcome—but they did overcome it and became a role model team.

I came in as their coach and noticed that their product owner changed priorities for the team about every 45 seconds. They were stopping and starting so often that they couldn't ever get any real work done.

To bring visibility to this problem, I started having them show a sprint burndown chart every morning at their Daily Scrum. This chart is a visual indicator to show what work was committed to when they did planning, when unplanned work got added and how close they were to getting all of their work done each sprint.

Burndown Chart Example

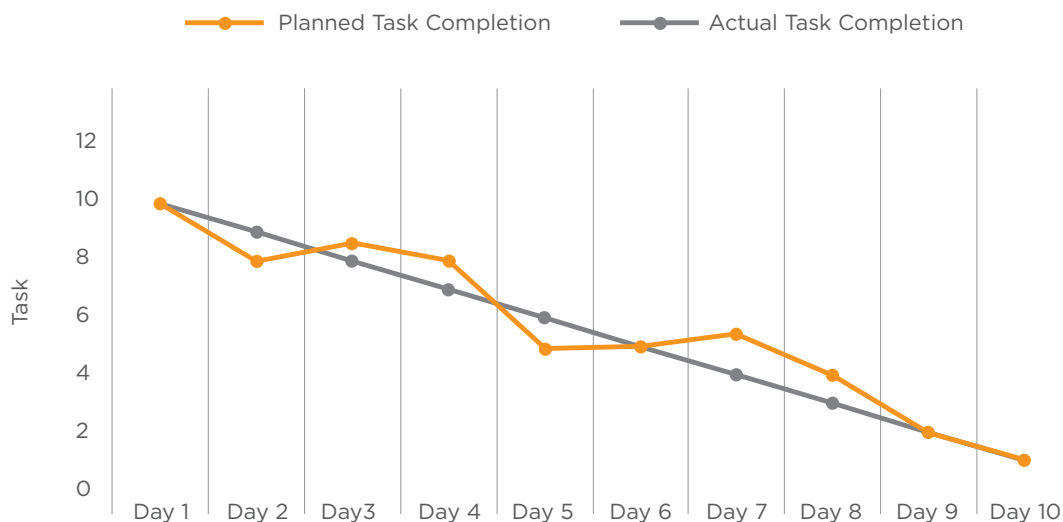


Image courtesy of Workfront

When work got added during the sprint, the orange line would go up rather than down. This opened up the product owner's eyes to exactly how his constantly changing work requests was impacting the team's ability to get anything done.

This really helped the product owner get better at managing stakeholders with "What aren't we going to do then?" "Not now" or "No." And the truth was, the stakeholders respected those decisions because they were able to see how much better the team performed and how the work they were expecting got done on time more often than not.

So the horrible team became a high performing team that was asked to be a role model to executives.

Chapter 5: Incorporating feedback into your workflow

Once your team has gotten down the basics of working in agile marketing and can deliver work in short, iterative cycles, feedback is key. You'll want to ensure that feedback is getting collected, talked about in a regular cadence and used effectively to inform what your team will work on next.

Feedback should be part of your daily cadence

A great agile marketing team that I worked with really nailed how they handled feedback. As part of their morning standup meeting, each team member would share any feedback they had gotten from any piece of marketing that had gone live recently.

Shannon would give a quick update such as, "The Face-book ad we are running on our new hospital is performing better than expected. Our benchmark was 25 clicks a day and we're averaging 40."

Next, Dan says, "The webinar we held yesterday had a lot lower attendance than the ones we've held in the past. I think it may be caused by the fact that we sent fewer emails this time promoting the event."

At the end of the standup meeting, a few team members would gather to discuss some of these learnings, especially if it meant they could alter how they would work differently today. Other team members went back to work and didn't need to stay.

Since Dan was already working on marketing the next webinar, he and a few team members chatted about what they could do differently and decided to send out a more targeted email to see if that would drive attendance. While they had already planned to send an email, their conversation led to a tweak in the messaging.



"With agile marketing, the idea is to constantly inspect and adapt and make little tweaks along the way."

Every two weeks this team would have a Sprint Review with key stakeholders. Not only did they use this time to show examples of recently launched marketing, but also to discuss how the campaigns were performing, what they had learned and what they could do differently in the future.

In the case of the webinar, the team and the stakeholders came to the conclusion that too many webinars were causing an attendance drop and they would not even do the next one.

In traditional marketing organizations, feedback typically happens one time and one time only — at the end of a campaign when it's too late to change anything. With agile marketing, the idea is to constantly inspect and adapt and make little tweaks along the way.



Data & analytics are great, but not required

So many times teams will tell me that they can't collect feedback because they don't have the right software or the right data person on the team.

While marketing data is by all means wonderful and helpful, it's less about having the data and more about the ability to pause and reflect on what's happening with your marketing and using whatever information you have — hard data or just anecdotal, to make better decisions.

I once worked with a large bank that was new to agile marketing. They'd contracted an ad agency to write 10 articles about budget travel. They were so focused on the output of the 10 articles, that they never stopped to inspect and adapt and ask themselves, "Does the content resonate with our target audience?" "Are the readers making the connection between budget travel and opening a retirement account?" And because the agency was being compensated for output (write 10 travel articles) rather than achieving a business goal, there was no incentive for them to get feedback and pivot.

Agile marketing isn't just about faster delivery — it's about the ability to experiment and pivot when necessary. Feedback doesn't have to be fancy. It just needs to be timely, relevant and acted upon.

Feedback can come in many simple forms such as clicks, attendees, etc., but one thing that will help here is for the team to decide on criteria or a baseline for "Yes, we're on the right track" or "No, we need to adjust."

As the team is preparing the work in the backlog, they often meet in a ceremony called Backlog Refinement. This is a great time before the work begins to align on the baseline. For example, they may discuss a webinar that they're planning on marketing next week. This webinar is part of a series and they have some attendance data from the past. From the past six webinars, you've had an average of 100 attendees, but your goal is to reach new people and retain ones from the past. Therefore, your team decides its baseline for success is 120 attendees. If it's lower than that, you'll discuss changing something. If it's that number or higher, you'll continue working as planned.

By taking a little time to evaluate what metrics mean you're able to proceed with no questions asked. You know in advance what will cause the team to reflect and revisit a strategy. You can incorporate feedback into how you work without any expensive tools required.

Chapter 6: Leading Culture Change

A command and control culture can be a quick killer for agile marketing teams. Learn how you can talk to leaders in your organization about the culture change required to succeed with agile marketing.

Getting your managers to stop assigning work

This is the one that gets new teams every time — you've agreed to work in agile marketing, which means that the team works from a prioritized backlog and no longer takes work requests from their boss. Ouch, this one can make your manager feel really displaced and unsure of what to do.

As an agile team member, it's important to help your boss understand the impact of you taking on her 'really quick task' to the team. Explain to her that your team commits to a certain number of stories in a sprint and even though it feels like a quick thing, if every team member took on one quick thing, the stakeholders would not get the work that they were expecting.

A manager's role in agile is not to assign work, but to support the craft and the people. Explain how her role is really valuable in this way and see if she's willing to brainstorm ways that she can help her staff.

It may also help to show how teams that aren't interrupted can focus on doing the most important work and that they earn greater stakeholder trust by becoming more predictable and delivering a set amount of work each sprint.



“Agile is all about small wins. So while you may not be able to change everything at once, a few steps in the right direction can go a long way.”



You may also want to discuss what type of work warrants interrupting the team. This may need to be done as a group meeting with the team's direct manager. When you can come to this working agreement ahead of time, it will avoid a lot of future conflicts.

For example, the managers and the team may agree that something that has caused a legal or public relations crisis would be cause for interrupting a team mid-sprint. I worked for a cereal company once that had a crisis when their cereal was tainted. They were running an ad on their website, and it had to be pulled down for legal reasons. That would be work that requires all hands on deck, doing whatever it takes to fix the problem.

However, in most cases managers are just used to getting what they want when they want it, and don't want to wait. If trying the steps above still doesn't work, try the data-driven approach.

The burndown chart, which was shared earlier in this book, can bring some visibility to the impact managers have to the team when they add work. When the orange line goes up, it's because work was added. Track all of the time work was added and discuss how it impacts completion negatively. If stakeholders that are waiting for this work are getting let down, most likely your boss will not want that to continue happening.

Also, if your boss is someone who puts work on the backlog for the team, try to set reasonable expectations ahead of time about turnaround times and how the prioritization process works.



Giving the team ownership

When we move from a demand and delivery way of doing marketing to one where we are allowing the team to take on more ownership of work, it also means being accountable. This shift in power takes a high level of trust from managers to team members, which isn't always easy.

Let's take the example of creating a marketing email. In your old way of working, your boss may have given you explicit instructions on what to write, when to send the email, which audience, which graphics, etc. In the new way of working, we're allowing the team to own a lot of the "how" the email will get done by giving the context of a desired outcome. In this case, it's important for everyone on the team to have a shared understanding of what the team needs to think about for an email.

Perhaps every email needs to have a click to a landing page, a logo, etc. Does the team need to think about lead generation and what happens next, or is just sending the email enough?

I just had a conversation with a CMO of a large marketing organization on this very topic. She was used to stepping in and saving the day and didn't trust the team to be accountable for its work. However, instead of talking to the team about her expectations, she would swoop in and fix the problem herself.

One example was when all leads from a tradeshow were expected to be entered into Salesforce — but the team didn't do that last time because someone told them not to and they didn't question the decision. When there isn't clarity around who's doing what, trust can easily be broken.

A way to start to build trust is to have a working session with leaders and get agreement on what exactly the team will own, quality standards that are expected and how the team will learn from mistakes. The team also needs to be prepared to be honest with management and own up to any shortcomings rather than place blame elsewhere.

It may take time to change culture (in some companies, a long time), but as a team member it's important that you help educate leaders in this new way to work. And remember, agile is all about small wins. So while you may not be able to change everything at once, a few steps in the right direction can go a long way.



Conclusion

Working on an agile marketing team can be really empowering! You get a lot more say in how work gets done. You'll also find that the prioritization and sprint time boxes allow you to work at a much more sustainable pace. It will get easier to say no to ad hoc requests when work is done in a more collaborative, transparent way.

Some of the biggest challenges you may encounter are more about culture than process. Remember that culture change takes time, but you can be an influencer by sharing your team's success stories, being open about shortcomings and holding yourself and your team accountable to high quality marketing work.



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